

SOCIALIST STUDIES

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**OFFICIAL JOURNAL OF
THE SOCIALIST PARTY
OF GREAT BRITAIN**

Communications to: General Secretary,
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THE SOCIALIST PARTY OF GREAT BRITAIN

OBJECT

The establishment of a system of society based upon the common ownership and democratic control of the means and instruments for producing and distributing wealth by and in the interest of the whole community.

DECLARATION OF PRINCIPLES

THE SOCIALIST PARTY OF GREAT BRITAIN HOLDS:

1. That society as at present constituted is based upon the ownership of the means of living (i.e., land, factories, railways, etc.) by the capitalist or master class, and the consequent enslavement of the working class, by whose labour alone wealth is produced.
2. That in society, therefore, there is an antagonism of interests, manifesting itself as a class struggle, between those who possess but do not produce, and those who produce but do not possess.
3. That this antagonism can be abolished only by the emancipation of the working class from the domination of the master class, by the conversion into the common property of society of the means of production and distribution, and their democratic control by the whole people.
4. That as in the order of social evolution the working class is the last class to achieve its freedom, the emancipation of the working class will involve the emancipation of all mankind without distinction of race or sex.
5. That this emancipation must be the work of the working class itself.
6. That as the machinery of government, including the armed forces of the nation, exists only to conserve the monopoly by the capitalist class of the wealth taken from the workers, the working class must organise consciously and politically for the conquest of the powers of government, national and local, in order that this machinery, including these forces, may be converted from an instrument of oppression into the agent of emancipation and the overthrow of privilege, aristocratic and plutocratic.
7. That as all political parties are but the expression of class interests, and as the interest of the working class is diametrically opposed to the interests of all sections of the master class, the party seeking working class emancipation must be hostile to every other party.
8. The Socialist Party of Great Britain, therefore, enters the field of political action determined to wage war against all other political parties, whether alleged labour or avowedly capitalist, and calls upon the members of the working class of this country to muster under its banner to the end that a speedy termination may be wrought to the system which deprives them of the fruits of their labour, and that poverty may give place to comfort, privilege to equality, and slavery to freedom.

ALL ENQUIRIES AND APPLICATIONS FOR MEMBERSHIP TO...
The Socialist Party of Great Britain,
71 Ashbourne Court, Woodside Park Road, London N12 8SB

IN COMMEMORATION OF THE COMMUNIST MANIFESTO

A hundred and fifty years ago a small group of political refugees, mainly German, along with a few other radicals published to a world that hardly noticed it the most famous document in working class history, the **Communist Manifesto**. A few weeks later the adherents of the Manifesto had scattered to participate in the revolutions that shook Europe during 1848; revolutions upon which they had built hopes that were rapidly dissipated. The document they had produced, however, after remaining in obscurity for a time began to travel round the world, giving hope and inspiration to the exploited and laying the foundations of the scientific Socialist movement. The appeal of the Manifesto and its growing influence were based upon its clear and accurate analysis of the foundations and the trends of the Capitalist system, whose development was still in its early stages.

The face of the world then was vastly different from what it is today. A large part of Europe still fretted under relics of Feudalism, although in the west, and especially in England, capitalism was making great industrial strides. The blind passion to accumulate wealth for its own sake had taken complete possession of sections of the privileged class and factory production was taking heavy toll of its victims, which included women and children. At the same period the growth of trading was invading and weakening the old state demarcations and urging the privileged sections of subject groups to acquire self-determination. Thus the fight of the monied class for power and the fight of subject nations for political freedom were the all-absorbing questions of the day. Agriculture was still the dominating industry, and the peasant and the small producer were the most active of the non-privileged groups. Even in England, the foremost industrial country, the working class proper was still a minority of the population. It was impossible for the writers of the Manifesto to entirely escape the influence of the conditions of their environment; it is amazing to reflect upon their clearness of vision and prophetic insight in the midst of contradictory currents that made the trends of capitalism so difficult to follow.

The principles developed by the Manifesto and the way in which it characterises the capitalist method of production, as well as the materialist conception on which it is based, are as fitting today as when it was written. The clearness, verve, and felicity of phrasing has never been surpassed. This is the more astonishing when one remembers that the writers, Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, had neither of them reached the age of thirty.

The Manifesto contains four sections, the first of which is concerned with an analysis of society. This section opens with the sentence: "*The history of all hitherto existing society (civilised society) is the history of class struggles*", and later follows with a description of capitalism:-

The modern bourgeois society that has sprouted from the ruins of feudal society has not done away with class antagonisms. It has but established new classes, new conditions of oppression, new forms of struggle in place of the old ones.

Our epoch, the epoch of the bourgeoisie, possesses, however, this distinctive feature - it has simplified the class antagonisms. Society as a whole is more and more splitting up into two hostile camps, into two great classes directly facing each other: Bourgeoisie and Proletariat.

The bourgeoisie has stripped of its halo every occupation hitherto honoured and looked up to with reverent awe. It has converted the physician, the lawyer, the priest, the poet, the man of science, into its paid wage-labourers.

Constant revolutionising of production, uninterrupted disturbance of all social conditions, everlasting uncertainty and agitations distinguish the bourgeois epoch from all earlier ones.

How true, sweeping and trenchant is this description! Yet it was written a hundred and fifty years ago when the all-embracing ugliness of the system was only

emerging. The position of the worker as a wage slave is clearly set forth, as is also the necessity of the capture of political power by the workers in order to achieve their emancipation. The first section concludes with a paragraph that makes clear the inevitability of the triumph of the working class.

The essential condition for the existence and the sway of the bourgeois class, is the formation and augmentation of capital: the condition for capital is wage-labour. Wage-labour rests exclusively on competition between the labourers. The advance of industry, whose involuntary promoter is the bourgeoisie replaces the isolation of the labourers, due to competition, by their revolutionary combination, due to association. The development of Modern Industry, therefore, cuts from under its feet the very foundation on which the bourgeoisie produces and appropriates products. What the bourgeoisie therefore produces, above all, are its own grave-diggers. Its fall and the victory of the proletariat are equally inevitable.

The succeeding sections of the Manifesto are concerned with the practical means to achieve its object, but these are based upon the conditions of 1848, conditions that have long since passed away. These parts of the Manifesto are therefore now obsolete, but they are just the parts that have frequently been used as guides by reformers and those whose impatience has made them blind to changing political conditions. The writers were pioneers mapping out new territory, and territory whose configuration was in process of change. That they should have been over-enthusiastic about the nearness of social change or the nature of the particular steps to be taken to accomplish a change at a time when capitalism was still under-developed is as understandable as it is remarkable that their outlook should have been so clear fundamentally. But the writers saw further and clearer than their associates and the main body of their successors. Hence the weaknesses instead of the strength of the Manifesto have made the greatest appeal and have led the social democratic movement they started into the mire of futile reform programmes. The Manifesto was like a small craft on a stormy sea with its compass set in the right direction, but succeeding helmsmen were unable to read the

compass properly.

The working class movement from the date of the Manifesto followed two divergent courses: the first, the scientific course, remained a thin small stream, while the second, the reformist course, grew in volume until it reached torrential power. This is explained in part by the two aspects of the Manifesto - the theoretical and the practical. It was upon the practical side, that is the temporary and weaker side, that the movement concentrated more and more, as it grew in volume, until the theoretical basis became completely submerged in the 'practical' questions of the day, in other words, reformist policies and programmes.

We are no worshippers of leaders or 'great men', but we recognise the magnificent work done by Marx and Engels and other contributors to the scientific socialist movement which began with the publication of the Communist Manifesto. We stand on the shoulders of those past workers who have helped us up and we profit by what they have done to make our social vision clearer. We are members of the working class and hold, with the writers of the Manifesto, that "*The proletarians have nothing to lose but their chains. They have a world to win.*" We hold further that this world can only be won by the workers prosecuting the class struggle unremittingly, spurning all attempts to seduce them into support of reform programmes, abandoning the worship of leaders and depending upon their own efforts alone.

The best tribute to Marx and Engels is to recognise what is permanent in their work and put aside that which was dictated by the confused and temporary circumstances of the time in which they wrote. It is in this spirit that we ~~commemorate~~ the publication of the Communist Manifesto of 1848 as one of the greatest events in working class history.

Taken from the **Socialist Standard**, February 1948 and
republished in full with just two alterations for re-print in 1998

MARX MISUNDERSTOOD

Lately there have been attempts to 'restore' Marx's reputation. These originated, oddly, in an article in *The New Yorker* magazine by John Cassidy, entitled *The Next Big Thinker*. This article was commented on by James Buchan in *The Observer* (19 October 1997) and later reprinted by the *Independent on Sunday* (7 December 1997).

Buchan contrives to discuss Marx's ideas and his influence without even mentioning class or the class struggle. After a superficial reading, Buchan tells his readers that the materialist conception of history is simply the idea that "*being determines consciousness*". He simply ignores the more controversial aspect of Marx's theory of history, that class struggle is the motor force of history.

He tells us exactly where Marx went wrong: "*Money exchange ... rather than the relations of production of Marx's later work, was the capital source of our delusions.*" Yet Marx based his assertion that "*being determines consciousness*" on his argument about the important role of the relations of production.

In the social production which men carry on they enter into definite relations that are indispensable and independent of their will ... The totality of these relations of production constitutes the economic structure of society - the real foundation, on which legal and political superstructures arise and to which definite forms of social consciousness correspond. The mode of production of material life determines the general character of the social, political and spiritual processes of life. It is not the consciousness of men that determines their being, but, on the contrary, their social being determines their consciousness.

Preface, 1859

Buchan's 'money exchange' exists, not in a vacuum, but in the context of definite

social and economic relations. After all, the existence and use of money presupposes the existence of buyers and sellers, owners and non-owners. Ownership is a social relation. The real problem with capitalism is not 'money exchange' but the property and class system which make buying and selling necessary.

"The individual carries his social power, as well as his bond with society, in his pocket... money can have a social property only because individuals have alienated their own social relationship from themselves so that it takes the form of a thing."

Grundrisse: Penguin, p159-160

John Cassidy's longer article is also, whatever his intentions were, a distortion of Marx and what he stood for. Cassidy wants us to appreciate Marx only for his analysis of capitalism.

Marx's legacy has been obscured by the failure of communism, which wasn't his primary interest. Marx was a student of capitalism, and this is how he should be judged.

Like Buchan, Cassidy presents a simple, uncontroversial version of the materialist conception of history - that "economics is the driving force in human development". To be fair, he does tell his readers that Marx "wasn't a crude reductionist" but he disregards the fact that Marx's theory is one of interaction and dialectic, as when Marx wrote: "by acting on the external world and changing it, man at the same time changes his own nature".

Cassidy credits Marx with drawing attention to globalisation and sees its relevance in modern trends to protectionism, xenophobia and so-called 'fair trade' policies. He seems to prefer Marx's emphasis on the entrepreneur and the profit motive, as compared with neoclassical economists with their focus on consumers. Likewise he sees Marx's influence - albeit unacknowledged - in those modern economists who explain the drive for technical development as arising out of

capitalist competition: *"their main aim is to demonstrate how technical progress emerges from the competitive process, and not from Heaven, as in the neoclassical model"*.

He notes that businessmen hold a similar view of competition to that of Marx and quotes J Welch, Chairman of General Electric, speaking to shareholders in 1989: *"Ahead of us are Darwinian shake-outs in every major marketplace, with no consolation prizes for the losing companies and nations"*.

Citing statistics from Britain and the USA which indicate growing inequality in the 1980-1996 period, Cassidy argues that this was produced by the 'rightwing backlash' against social democratic, welfare, health, etc. reforms etc. However he leaves out any reference to Marx's thinking about the trade cycle which would have helped explain the conflicts within capitalist politics.

It is odd that Cassidy, who seems to understand Marx's theory of 'immiseration', seems to think it has only been relevant during the last two decades. Yet if he had understood the Labour Theory of Value, Marx's explanation of how capital is constantly created from the workers' unpaid labour, he should have realised that this process was operating much further back than 20 years.

He credits Marx with noting the relationship between levels of unemployment and workers' living standards - a fact which is still denied by most orthodox economists. Cassidy also notes with approval Marx's view of the role of the government in a capitalist state: *"Marx delighted in declaring that politicians merely carry water for their corporate paymasters"*.

Yet in spite of all this agreement with Marx, Cassidy's article manages to avoid the controversial and crucial issues which make Marx the great unmentionable. Ideas like that of the class struggle as being the driving force in history; that Labour and Capital are classes with conflicting interests; that workers are exploited whenever and wherever they have to sell their labour power, that as

long as the working class are employed for wages or salaries, the capitalist class profit from their unpaid labour, or Marx's outrageously revolutionary ideas - that every class struggle has to be a political struggle, and that the workers' emancipation has to be the work of the working class itself, a class-conscious working class. Of all this, Cassidy says almost nothing.

Marx did more, much more, than merely to provide an explanation of how capitalism works. His theories were revolutionary and meant to serve the cause of Labour, not Capital. *"The philosophers have only interpreted the world in different ways; the point is to change it"*.

PARTNERSHIP - OR HUMBUG

New Labour are good at empty slogans - compassion with a hard edge, welfare-to-work, etc. In their Manifesto, there was an emphasis on *"partnership with business"*, and *"a flexible labour market that serves employers and employees alike"*. If you search hard, you may find a guarded approval for *"a sensibly set minimum wage ... decided according to the economic circumstances of the time"*.

Nearly a year later, the labour market continues, as flexible as ever. As before, it serves the interests of employers not workers. As for the TUC with their hopes of getting union recognition backed by law - *"where a majority of the relevant workforce vote in a ballot for the union to represent them"* -, there is only the sour sense of a sell-out, the belief that Blair's deal with union-basher Murdoch and his servile press involved a secret concession to soft-pedal union recognition.

The idea of partnership between employers and workers is empty rhetoric. It is high time for unions and workers generally to realize that no government serves the workers' interests. The only interest workers have is the interest to replace Capitalism with Socialism.

LABOUR'S CAPITALIST FRIENDS

Labour has always courted the capitalist class and the capitalist class has always courted the Labour Party. Those with long memories might recall Harold Wilson's set of capitalist friends when he was prime minister. So the outrage around Bernie Ecclestone seems misplaced. When the Conservatives were in power he wanted to influence any policy which might effect his business. Seeing that Labour might win the next election he switched support and gave them £1 million. Mr Ecclestone must be pleased with himself. He has bought influence and now is going to get his contribution back even though the Labour party has spent it. Luckily for Labour another wealthy capitalist donated a further £1 million to cover it.

Other capitalists made similar decisions to support New Labour. **The Sunday Times** (16 November 1997) claimed that the Labour Party received donations of several million pounds from capitalists like Lord Sainsbury, whose company has been given government approval to build a large controversial supermarket near Richmond-upon-Thames. The late Matthew Harding, the former vice chairman of Chelsea Football Club also donated. So, too, did the little known capitalist Robert Devereux. And, of course, there is Geoffrey Robinson, Paymaster General on no salary (his private wealth is apparently sufficient), with whom Mr Blair holidays in his private villa in Italy.

Although the Sunday Times investigation into the support of New Labour from capitalists making large donations in the pursuit of particular interests, they were, nevertheless, quiescent about their own employer, Mr Murdoch, whom Blair met in Australia just before the General Election. Rupert Murdoch gave support to New Labour through forcing **Sun** journalists to put New Labour in a good light during the last election. John Lloyd, Associate Editor of the Blair-worshipping **New Statesman** (owned by the millionaire Mr Robinson), also now writes a weekly column in the **Times** praising the Blair administration to the hilt.

It makes sense. Murdoch's kept poodles like Lord Rees-Mogg might hark on about the Free Market, but that is the last thing on Murdoch's mind. He wants to destroy his competitors and monopolise all the markets in which he has investments. This is particularly so of the newspaper industry. His support for the Labour Party ironically coincided with the Labour Party deciding not to stop capitalists using their profits from one part of their business empire to subsidise other areas, thereby undercutting their opposition.

The sleaze around the Labour Government and its U-turns has all the academics and intellectuals up in arms. They want the capitalist class as a whole to fund political parties through taxation. They want large donations over £1,000 registered with the Electoral Commissioner. Much hot air is vented over the question of political probity and integrity. There have even been demands for political principles.

But when has the Labour Party ever worried about principles? Whatever happens there will still be capitalist political parties serving the interests of particular sections of the capitalist class. Capitalist governments will still exist to serve the interest of British capitalism. And there might be some highly creative accounting procedures and use of 'front' organisations. There will be, perhaps, more advertisements from capitalist organisations like the Adam Smith Institute. Individual capitalists could buy up political time in the media. At the end of the day, it is the capitalists' interests and their money.

The working class should let the capitalists and their political parties get on with it. As Marx and Engels noted, the state is the *"executive committee of the capitalist class"* and this applies equally to New Labour as it does to any other capitalist political party. Workers should not give any support to any capitalist political party whether it be funds or the vote. Workers have no interest in supporting New Labour, the Tories or the Liberal Democrats. Workers, instead, should give support to the Socialist Party of Great Britain by becoming Socialists and joining our party. It should be support backed up by an understanding of

capitalism; why capitalism can never be made to work in the interests of all society and why, of necessity, capitalism has to be replaced by Socialism.

That is the support Socialists are looking for. The SPGB receives its donations from subscriptions to Socialist Studies, from donations at meetings and lectures, and from members of the working class. We hide nothing. We could do with more money and if the capitalist class wants to off-load some of their profits by channelling it our way then we will not lose too much sleep about it. But we only put the interest of one group forward in our political action: the interest of the working class as a whole. The funds we receive do not go on sectional interests. We favour no one trade union and no particular group within the working class. There is one working class and one class struggle.

MARX AND INFLATION

Marx showed that if the total amount of gold is replaced by inconvertible paper money, and if the amount of that paper money is then issued in excess, prices are pushed up accordingly.

"If the quantity of paper money issued is, for instance, double what it ought to be, then in actual fact one pound has become the money name of about one-eighth of an ounce of gold instead of about one quarter of an ounce The values previously expressed by the price £1 will now be expressed by the price £2." Capital, Vol.I, Allen and Unwin Edition, p108

THE SOCIALIST ATTITUDE TO TRADE UNIONS

The Socialist Party of Great Britain supports the efforts of workers through trade union organisation to defend and improve their wages and conditions of work. If they did not struggle against their employers they would be worse off. As Marx phrased it in **Value, Price and Profit**, if workers abandon the class struggle for higher wages and salaries:

"... they would be degraded to one level mass of broken wretches past salvation. By cowardly giving way in their every-day conflict with capital, they would certainly disqualify themselves for the initiating of any large movement."

But trade union action is action against the effects of the capitalist system. It cannot achieve the abolition of Capitalism and the establishment of Socialism. Trade unions have to take the workers as they are and most of them are not socialists and therefore are not in favour of establishing Socialism.

The establishment of Socialism requires political action, but not just any political action. Political organisation to secure reform of capitalism can no more achieve Socialism than can strikes for higher wages.

What is required is political organisation and action by socialists, to gain control of the machinery of government for the purpose of introducing Socialism.

Some reforms of capitalism may be of some limited use to the working class or sections of the working class, though most reforms are not, but organisations that advocate reforming capitalism are of no use whatever for the task of establishing Socialism. Such organisations can only maintain themselves by encouraging the delusion that the basic evils of capitalism can be reformed out of existence. Such an organisation must attract reformists and seek the support and

vote of reformists, and when its support among the non-Socialist electorate becomes big enough it has to take on the task of forming a government and carrying on capitalism and waging its wars. This has been the role of the Labour Party whose government has now begun an assault on single mothers, the disabled and the sick. The running of capitalism imposes on governments - Labour, Tory or otherwise anti-working class measures.

Organisation and propaganda for Socialism can only be carried on by a party whose members are Socialists. If a party aiming at Socialism were to diverge from that aim by advocating reforms it would likewise attract non-Socialists. It would be submerged by them and the socialist message would be lost.

That is why the Socialist Party does not advocate reforms, and why it tells the working class that trade union struggles against the employers are useful, but the creation of reformist political organisations which just serve to perpetuate capitalism is useless.

A "WELTER OF REFORMS"

"The achievement of reforms became ends in themselves... The progress that the Social Democratic parties made ... simply organised Capitalism more effectively in the interests of the capitalist class as a whole."

SPGB, *The Communist Manifesto and the last hundred years*, 1948, p27.

THE DEATH OF SOCIALISM?

Ever since the collapse of state capitalism in Russia the media, politicians and academics have all clamoured to proclaim Marx and his political ideas dead and buried.

The academic market in books on Marx continue but in an extremely negative way. In Professor Gellner's book **Condition of Liberty: Civil Society and its Rivals** a whole chapter is devoted to '*The Marxist Failure*'. Given the explanatory power of the materialist conception of history, the labour theory of value and the political concept of the class struggle, Marxism certainly has not failed. On subjects such as economic depressions, class conflict, productivity, unemployment, poverty and war, Marxism is exemplary. Yet at no time in human history have so many come forward to proclaim the writings of any one writer as irrelevant or dead.

The rise of Tony Blair and his New Labour Party has also meant another death notice. Apparently, joining Marx in the political graveyard, we now find Socialism.

With an overt commitment to capitalism, the market and the interests of the capitalist class, New Labour has buried much of its history; the influence of the Webbs, the old Fabians, G D H Cole and others who advocated nationalisation, the old Clause IV, and its romantic attachment to the plight of workers. Out, too, has gone any reference to Socialism. Hunt for the word in Labour's pamphlets or the speeches of government ministers and it is nowhere to be seen. Of course Labour never had any entitlement to use the word Socialism in the first place. The Labour Party has always been an anti-working class political organisation.

And so it comes as no surprise that after one of Blair's more politically ignorant supporters, Kim Howell, let it be known that "*socialism*" should be "*humanely phased out of the Labour Party*," journalists fell over themselves to be

the first to proclaim the death of Socialism.

Save us from intellectuals

First off the block to send condolences was the journalist Clare Game. In her article **Grappling with a Doctrine that was Meant to be a Panacea but was often Considerably Less** (*Independent on Sunday* 15 November 1996) she quoted from a rag-bag of intellectuals each of whom offered their own ludicrous definition of Socialism.

From the eugenicist H G Wells we had Socialism defined as:

No more and no less than criticism of the idea of property in the light of the public good.

Nothing, it should be noted, about the need to abolish private property ownership in all its forms.

G B Shaw considered Socialism in terms of "*equality of income or nothing*", which is nonsense. The wages system can never be equitable, since wages and salaries vary according to the demand for particular skills and the varied costs of education and training. Capitalists - even without training - have higher unearned incomes than most workers however skilled.

Predictably, J M Keynes thought Socialism:

A dusty survival of the plan to meet a problem 50 years ago, based on the misunderstanding of what someone said 100 years ago.

This 'someone' was Marx whom Keynes dismissed contemptuously. But it is Keynes' theories of full employment and a crisis-free capitalism which are utterly discredited now while Marx's own writings on trade depressions have stood the test

of time.

Clare Game also threw in the ridiculous assertion by Winston Churchill that Socialism was:

The philosophy of failure, the creed of ignorance and the gospel of envy.

This attacks the person and not the case for Socialism. As with all attacks on the person, it is easily answered. For the question of whether a Socialist belief or idea is justified is quite independent of the person who holds those beliefs and ideas. The argument for socialism does not collapse because some of the people who accept the need for Socialism are alleged 'failures' or 'ignorant'. The socialist case against capitalism rests on class interests and the inability of capitalism to meet the needs of all society.

Finally at the head of the coffin carriers are Kinnock and Blair. Both believe Socialism means values about individual justice. This is the stuff of classical Liberalism and not Socialist concerns with social systems, social relationships, property ownership and class struggle. The idea of social justice and distribution within class society is an old doctrine. Marx ridiculed it in the **Poverty of Philosophy** where he showed that you cannot distribute according to need while retaining the profit objective. Something has to give. If you try to reform capitalism, production for profit will remain and socialist distribution will be impossible. If you want to have socialist distribution then capitalist production for profit has to go.

Nowhere did the article deal with Socialism as the common ownership and democratic control of the means of production and distribution by all of society. It was a coffin without a body carried by charlatans.

More Death Notices

A week later **The Independent on Sunday** (22 November 1996) carried on with Socialism's 'obituary'. A cartoon proclaimed Socialism to be dead and buried. On the tomb stone was inscribed:

In memory of Socialism: Born out of Class Struggle; killed by the Market.

On the same page Neal Ascherson tried to give the pathetic cartoon some intellectual justification.

Mr Ascherson knows all about the SPGB. He knows of our criticism of his praise of Tony Blair, his Scottish nationalism; and his rejection of Marx's theory of primitive communism. His pitiful defence of protectionism was commented upon in **Socialist Studies 18**.

His article begins by recalling how, in the 1960's, he came across a chalked message to the voters of Glasgow Woodside which read:

If you do not understand and want Socialism do not vote for the candidate of the Socialist Party of Great Britain.

Ascherson states that for integrity the SPGB slogan cannot be beaten and concluded:

Its authors were and still are an austere Marxist sect founded well before the Russian revolution. But I no longer remember, if I ever knew, how many voters concluded after searching their hearts that they did indeed both understand and want Socialism in Woodside and were worthy to cast their ballot for the SPGB. Few I suppose but the finest.

So in two paragraphs of his article Mr Ascherson write us off with a

sneering insult about the SPGB being an "*austere Marxist sect*" and damning us with faint praise. Our Socialism poses Mr Ascherson a problem. And for a very good reason. Our Socialism and our Socialist politics gets in the way of his obituary. You cannot pronounce something dead when it is alive and kicking. His silence on the SPGB's Socialism gives the lie away about those who proclaim Socialism to be dead.

Curiously Mr Ascherson, himself, has some doubts. For a little later he writes:

... It is much too early to say that Socialism is dead, even in Britain.

and goes on to say:

... an ideology as powerful and popular as Socialism was in the first half of the century does not evaporate when the climate changes. Instead it retreats underground into the water table of political thought ...

Was Socialism as powerful and popular in the first half of this century as Mr Ascherson claims? The class awareness necessary for Socialism was weak; the SPGB's size since 1904 reflects this fact. Discontent about capitalism and being a socialist revolutionary are not the same thing. There have been few Socialists this century but fortunately sufficient to maintain Socialist ideas, a Socialist object and a Socialist political party from one generation to the next. For most of this century the majority of the working class has voted and mistakenly supported capitalism.

A Funeral without a Corpse

As we dig deeper into Mr Ascherson's obituary we discover a very confused and confusing journalist. Is this the best the defenders of the capitalist class can do?

Mr Ascherson rightly claims that the Labour Party has never been Socialist. Yet in the next breath he claims Socialism has something to do with Labour's failed policies of 'redistribution taxation'. He also links Socialism with another discredited Labour dogma - nationalisation and state interference in the economy. His whole obituary is a fraud.

We can set Ascherson's poor thinking in the following way in order to highlight its shallow incompetence:

1. The Labour Party has never been a Socialist party.
2. The Labour Party has pursued, until Blair, policies of redistributive taxation, nationalisation and interference in the economy which have all failed.
3. Therefore Socialism is dead.

It is all nonsense. There is no logical connection. The conclusion does not follow from the premise.

Then Mr Ascherson goes on to quote from Donald Sassoon's flawed book **A Hundred years of Socialism**:

In the world of production, authority, hierarchy and discipline prevail. We vote for whoever we like, we buy whatever we can afford, but at work we do as we are told ... Controlling capitalism has proved far more difficult than controlling anything else because capitalism is a system based upon the control of the many by the few.

Hardly an advertisement for the death of Socialism. We still live in a society which is class divided, based upon class exploitation and a conflict between the interests of workers and employers, those who sell their labour power in order to live and those who buy this unique commodity in order to make a profit.

It is over the question of ownership and control that we can say that the alleged death of Socialism has been greatly exaggerated. At no time has there ever existed the common ownership and democratic control of the means for producing social wealth by all of society. For you cannot pronounce death of something which has never existed in the first place. You cannot say Socialism is dead when all the same social problems like poverty, insecurity, unemployment still face the working class. The death of Socialism is just wishful thinking by those who fear it most: the capitalist class and their uncritical sycophants.

The working class have yet to face up to the basic problems thrown up by capitalism. They suffer under exploitation but still support or acquiesce in the continuance of the system which only they can change. One thing is clear - - the social system of capitalism cannot continue without the overall support of workers, given because the prevailing ideas held by them are the ideas of the ruling class. They accept the idea of private property. The wages system to them is the natural order of things, appearing to be the only way to gain a livelihood. However, the social problems and inexorable pressures of capitalism, are making more workers apprehensive about the kind of existence they can expect under capitalism and what the future holds for their children and their grandchildren.

There is no scientific validity for the idea that social systems are unchangeable. The history of the ancient world and middle ages shows that past social systems, seemingly unassailable, were all subject to revolutionary change. Capitalism is no exception.

Materialist Conception of History - Introduction iii-iv.

GHETTO POLITICS

In recent years there has been a rise in 'special interest groups' such as anarchists, feminists, gays, lesbians, environmentalists, the disabled and so on.

What is noticeable is that each group believes it, and only it, is the most important group. They all vie from their political ghettos for special political attention. What they all have in common, though, is that they conveniently avoid the question of class, class ownership, class interest, class struggle and class exploitation.

Single issue groups also present a distorted and one-sided view of social power. Feminists blame men; blacks blame whites; and the disabled blame the able-bodied, with each interest group presenting their own respective case as a lack of political power.

Each group directs its attack on a particular enemy who, they argue, has too much social power, influence and control. Politics is reduced to a crass subjectivity of victim-hood, political correctness and bourgeois rights. All these groups make representations to pressure capitalist politicians, believing that all that is needed is the right policy, the right legal act and the right enforcement for their own particular problem to be resolved. No mention is made of the institution of private property ownership, the profit motive and the process of commodity production and exchange as being the primary causes for social problems. The capitalist class passes by unnoticed.

Racism, for example, is a real social problem. However, to believe that it can be resolved by legislation, education and propaganda is a shallow Liberal idealism. Without dealing with the primary cause of capitalism as an anarchic, competitive and exploitative social system, the problem remains. To believe white power is the problem is childish pop sociology. Race relations consultants at local authorities run pathetic courses on 'human dignity' and 'cultural diversity' for

employees without first criticising the social system in which we live. Until the focus of attention is centred on the competitive nature of capitalism with its divisive class relations, problems like racism and racial conflict will remain.

Socialists avoid this mistake. Workers do live in a class-divided society whether they are men or women, whites or blacks. They are exploited by capitalists whose sexuality, gender or race is irrelevant to this exploitation. Furthermore, class conflict is both a relationship between social classes and between these classes and the means of producing social wealth. It has to be understood that social relations are objective relations to what is produced, by whom and for what purpose. It is only when democratic control is obtained over the productive process that social problems will be solved or disappear. To solve the social problems facing workers, the working class first has to replace capitalism with Socialism.

No Revolutionary Policy

Pressure groups may get a lot of publicity and access to the media, something denied to Socialists, but they have no revolutionary potential and are of no use in raising class awareness. The disabled get a large sympathy vote while the homeless have full-time activists producing statistics showing how desperate their plight is. But the capitalist monopoly of the means of producing social wealth is not mentioned in the begging letters of the dozens of charities involved in these social problems. The gays, feminists and blacks have their academic professorships, courses, symposiums, Guardian and Independent features and endless Channel 4 television programmes but no criticism is ever made of capitalism. There is no chair in Socialist Studies. There is no television programme dealing with Socialist issues.

All special interest groups are dovetailed into capitalism. Many of their respective members are in the working class having to sell their mental or physical ability to work to employers but at each election end up voting for capitalist

political parties. Their social problems are bound up with their class position but they do not understand this and the various single issue groups they belong to do not exist for the purpose of enlightening them.

Little is said about gay, female or black employers exploiting their workforce. Labour-controlled local councils successfully divide workers across race, gender and sexuality through the imposition of women and black only groups aided and abetted by tame trade union officials. Employers are quick to see ghetto politics as a means to undermine the institutions of the working class, quick to exploit divisions and so shift the focus of attention away from capitalism and the capitalist class.

It is, perhaps, ironic that all special interest groups accept, tolerate and support capitalism. The leading spokesmen for each group never question the class divisions in society. Because of their position and wealth, the capitalist class can escape most social problems, particularly the problems facing workers. The Body Shop, for example, owned principally by Anita Roderick, a staunch supporter of New Labour, will not permit its largely poorly paid women workers to organise into unions but would rather they join Greenpeace. Ms Roderick is a staunch feminist, environmentalist and role model for women. How convenient.

No wonder some capitalists support ghetto politics. Special interest groups pose no threat to capitalism as a social system. The pathetic way in which the so-called 'New Left' encourages these groups is only indicative of their own political bankruptcy. The main concern of capitalists is that workers keep producing goods and services as wage slaves, and fight and die for them in their wars. The capitalist class with its ruling class ideas and beliefs, supported by a servile mass media, is a special interest group over and above all others, exploitative, parasitical and socially useless.

Ghetto Politics or Socialist Politics?

Ghetto politics divides the working class. Ghetto politics with its insular obsessions and concerns aids and abets capitalism and the capitalist class. What better way to undermine class divisions and class struggle than for capitalism's defenders to present society as being splintered and atomised into dozens of competing interest groups all with their own 'enemies' thereby posing no threat to class rule.

The fact remains that there is a working class. It is made up of men and women, people from all countries of the world and who share an identical set of interests and social problems because of their class position. All these millions of people are forced to work in order to live. It is they who produce all the social wealth although a large portion of it goes to a socially useless class of parasites.

The history of society is a history of class struggle. How convenient for politically marginalised members of the capitalist class to bring under their wings, for support and legitimacy, workers who share the same sex or colour. Once black or female capitalists have attained equal political representation or an economic edge in the buying and selling of commodities with white or male capitalists, the workers who supported their cause are dropped; they have served their purpose and their support is no longer needed.

One issue: Socialism

The working class now runs capitalism from top to bottom. However, workers run capitalism in the interests of capitalists and against their own class interest. The one issue workers have to pursue is the issue of Socialism. Workers need to understand that their social problems can only be solved once they have established common ownership and democratic control over the means of producing and distributing social wealth.

When a majority of workers have understood and desired Socialism they can democratically win political power through parliamentary action. They are the essential special interest group because it is only the working class who can secure a society free from poverty, inequality and discomfort. It is only Socialism which can provide a framework in which there will be no racism, no sexual conflict and violence, and where groups like the disabled will have direct access to what they need to lead fulfilling lives.

Only the Socialist Party of Great Britain has consistently declared as a matter of principle that the emancipation of the working class will involve the emancipation of all mankind without distinction of race or sex. We declare ourselves against all attempts to fragment or divide the working class, and we urge all workers - male or female, black, brown or white - all workers without exception to recognise their common interest in ending the class system, the system of employment which sets groups of workers into competition against each other, competing for jobs, housing, etc. Co-operation, not competition, is the way forward, based on our common, shared, class interest in replacing capitalism with Socialism.

For the S.P.G.B. to work with non socialist parties would create confusion and make it harder for the workers to understand the socialist case. What is needed is for each worker to make the crucial choice between capitalism and Socialism, to reject the one and support the other. For this the utmost clarity is required, not the confusion that would inevitably follow from associating with those who profess to support Socialism but who, in their deeds, are its enemies.

Socialist Principles Explained - p.24

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meets at 6 pm on the 4th Tuesday of month at
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Correspondence to the Secretary, S.P.G.B., 31 Caernarvon Road,
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Sunday 5 April WILLIAM MORRIS - SOCIALIST ?
A new look Speaker C. Deveraux

Sunday 26 April Far Eastern Tiger Economics
Boom to Bust Speakers: R. Lloyd
C. May

Venue:
Marchmont Community Centre,
62 Marchmont Street, London WC1.
(5 minutes Russell Square Tube Station).
Commence 3 p.m.

Questions. Discussion.

SUMMER SCHOOL 1998

We are pleased to announce that we shall be holding our 7th Summer School on Sunday 24th June at Marchmont Community Centre. We have yet to decide on the subject to be dealt with but full details will appear in Socialist Studies No 28, due out at the end of May. Our previous Summer Schools have afforded enjoyable occasions, with a good social atmosphere. Please make a note of the date.

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